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# Bible Hero Stories—

# ESTHER

Story and Pictures By  
J. H. Shonkwiler

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# ESTHER

## A CAPTIVE RACE



IN the land of Persia, many, many centuries ago, there lived a little Jewish girl whom her people called Hadassah. She lived with her cousin, a man named Mordecai, who, when both her parents died, took the little orphan girl and raised her up as his own daughter. Their home was in the great city of Susa, or Shushan, near to the palace of the great king who ruled over all that country from India to Egypt.

It may be that little Hadassah often played near the palace of the great king, who is called great, not because of any real greatness he may have had, but because he was the ruler over so many countries and peoples. The little girl may at times have seen the great king as he went to and from his palace, attended by long lines of chariots and armed horsemen. She may even during her childhood have been within the palace itself, for her foster father, Mordecai, was a man of consequence among his people, the Jews, and was one of the servants of the great king. The

*In the King's Gate* Bible says that Mordecai sat in the king's gate. This probably means that he was one of the king's judges or officials who sat in one of the city gates where ancient courts were often held, and settled small disputes among the people, in much the same way that the judges of our own courts settle disputes among the people to-day.

There was much for little Hadassah to see in the city of Susa. It was a beautiful city, with many fine buildings, and



its royal palace was one of the most famous of ancient times. There were long and splendid streets wherein great processions often moved to or from the palace and temples. Heavily laden caravans were ever coming and going. Many of the great people of the world came there also, from lands far away. Visiting princes with their gorgeous attendants, great teachers and artists and poets, world  
*Tourists of the* travelers of every sort, came long distances  
*Ancient World* to see and admire the art and industries of royal Susa. Persian workmen and artists were among the most skillful of ancient times.

The Jews in Persia were a captive race. Many years before little Hadassah's time a wicked king of that land had conquered the Jews' city of Jerusalem and killed or carried away captive most of its inhabitants, Hadassah's grandparents among them. The Jews were not slaves in Persia, nor, as a rule, badly treated. They could engage in business much as they pleased, and many of them were wealthy. They were free to come and go, even from one province of the kingdom to another. They could not, however, without special permission from the great king, return to live in their national land and city, Judea and Jerusalem.

Often, no doubt, had little Hadassah heard the story of her people. Well she knew of her own royal lineage, for her grandparents were of the kings and queens of Israel. Mordecai must have been careful to see that his beautiful little ward should learn about these things, so that the love of her own country and people and of their God might never go out of her heart.

As parents to-day often tell the children stories in the evening hours after the day's work is done, so must Mordecai have talked to little Hadassah when his tasks in the king's gate were over for the day. The stories he told to her were much the same as parents tell to the children now—stories of

Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebekah, and of Jacob and Rachel. No doubt he told her, too, of the slavery of their people in Egypt, and of how their great lawgiver, Moses, had delivered them. As the years passed and the

*Old, Old Stories* little girl became more and more able to under-  
*Ever New* stand, he told her about God and of His watchful care over their people throughout

their long history. From her big, loving cousin she learned to read the writings of their great prophets, and the Psalms of their poet-king, David. All their history she must have learned, even to the sad and bitter story of the captivity that had broken their nation and scattered its remnants throughout the provinces of the great king.

When Hadassah had grown almost to womanhood the great king died, and, after a time, a new king, Xerxes, whom the Bible calls Ahasuerus, came to the throne. We may learn a great deal about this king from our school histories. He was far from being a wise and prudent ruler like the great king just before him, and did many wicked and cruel things. In the third year of his reign he had a disgraceful quarrel with his queen, Vashti, that resulted in a foolish decree forbidding the queen ever again to enter his kingly presence.

*Ruler of Half  
the World*

The story of the quarrel is thus: Ahasuerus—or Xerxes, as our school histories call him—had called a great council of all the princes and rulers of the 127 provinces of his kingdom. For 180 days he had entertained them, making a grand show of his wealth and power.

At the end of this time the king made a great feast in the garden of his palace. He invited to the feast not only the visiting princes and their servants, but, in addition, all the people of his kingdom who might wish to come. The feast lasted seven days, and, while the men were eating and





*Mordecai Took the Little Orphan Girl and Brought Her Up as His Own Daughter*

drinking in the garden, the queen also was feasting the women inside the palace itself.

This feast of Ahasuerus was one of the most famous in history. For it the king's gardens were decorated in the richest splendor. Hangings of rich, white, green and blue cloth, fastened with enormous silver rings, swung between huge marble columns. The couches upon which the people reclined as they ate were of gold and silver and set upon a pavement of red, white, yellow and black marble. The feast was served in golden vessels, no two alike, and, by the king's order, every man, high or low, ate and drank as much or as little as he pleased. This was different from the usual rule in ancient royal feasts, wherein each guest was expected or even compelled to swallow as much food and drink as the king. As some of the ancient kings were notorious gluttons, this rule was sometimes fatal to guests unused to such excesses.

While the feast was at its height and the king's heart was merry with wine, he sent some of his nobles to bring Queen Vashti into the garden, that the princes and people might see her great beauty. But Vashti did not like the idea of making a show of herself. Quite rightly she refused to come. This made the king very angry. He called his wise men, who probably were as drunk as he, and inquired of them: "What shall be done to Queen Vashti, according to the law, because she has refused to obey the command of the great king?"

Over their cups, perhaps, the wise men considered the matter and gave their decision. It would not do, they said, for the queen to go unpunished. For what kind of authority would the men of Persia have over their households when it should become known to the women of the land that Queen Vashti had willfully disobeyed her royal lord and king? Vashti must come no more into the



presence of the king, they said, and a new queen must be chosen in her place. Moreover, they said, the king should issue a decree making every man, rich and poor alike, the ruler in his own house.

The drunken king listened to his wine-muddled counselors. He issued the foolish decree of banishment against the queen, signing it and affixing the royal seal, thereby making it a law of the land.

Next morning, after the effect of the wine had passed, the king, and perhaps the wise men also, were very sorry for what they had done. No doubt they would gladly have restored the queen to her rightful place, but they could not. It was written into the law of the Medes and Persians that a decree once made could not be altered. No matter how much the king really loved his beautiful queen, he was bound by his own law to see her no more.

Some time after the banishment of Queen Vashti, Mordecai heard what he, as a Jew, must have regarded as alarming news. The king was going to select a new queen. In order that he might make a choice befitting the ruler of half the world, he had commanded that the most beautiful maidens of his kingdom be brought together in the Shusan palace, so that he might choose the most beautiful among them as Vashti's successor.

Mordecai knew that his beautiful ward, Hadassah, now grown into sweet young womanhood, would surely be among those to pass before the royal presence. No doubt he would gladly have hidden her away, had he dared, so that the king's agents could not find her. But this would not only have cost him his life, but might also have resulted in some terrible act of vengeance against his people. In the face of this, Mordecai decided to do the next best thing. It would mean much to his people to have one of their race as queen of the land. For, while their condition of life in Persia was



*Mordecai Had Carefully Instructed Her What to Do*



not hard, yet many of their neighbors among other races who dwelt also in that country did not like them, because the Jews kept much to themselves. The Jews were very particular

about their associates. They would not allow their sons and daughters to marry among the other youth of the country, and they would not join in the worship of the Persian gods.

Because of these things, the Jews had to endure many little annoyances which would quickly be done away should one of their race become queen.


Thus it came about that, when Hadassah went with all the other maidens to the palace, Mordecai had carefully instructed her what to do. She was to tell no one of her race. When her time should come to go before the king, she was not to adorn herself as the other maidens were almost certain to do. Mordecai knew that Hadassah's simple beauty and purity of countenance and maidenly modesty was more likely to appeal to the king than all the fine jewels and costly garments she could put on. And thus it proved to be.

The Bible says that, when the king saw Hadassah, he loved her above all the other women. He soon learned that, besides being very beautiful, she was also wise and good.

He set the royal crown upon her head and changed her name to Ishtar, or, as we call it, Esther, which means "a star." It is the same star that we call Venus, and which is named after the Greek goddess of beauty, and called by the ancient Persians "Ishtar." When you see the planet Venus in the sky, just think that it is the same star after which King Ahasuerus named his beautiful queen Esther.

*"Esther" Means  
"a Star"*

## IN THE ROYAL HOUSE OF AHASUERUS

O Mordecai, as a Jew, the marriage of Esther to a Gentile was very distasteful, even though that Gentile be ruler of half the then known earth. The traditions and laws of his people were against such a union. But, as a member of a captive race in a foreign land, Mordecai would have no choice in the matter. The king's will was law over all his subjects, even to the taking of life. Besides, Mordecai believed in God, and he may have seen in this turn of events the hand of God working for the good of his stricken people.

That the king's choice was a stroke of good fortune to the Jews soon became evident. Ahasuerus began to show his love for his beautiful queen in many ways and to heap favors upon her. He made a great feast to all his princes and servants, and called it "Esther's Feast." To further honor her, he declared a holiday in all the provinces of his kingdom and made gifts to the people in keeping with the wealth and power of so great a king. But in this sudden rise to royal splendor and magnificence Esther did not forget her cousin Mordecai. She kept in close touch with him and obeyed him even as when she was a child in his household. As Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her race, the king's counselors did not know that the man who daily sat in the king's gate and served so loyally the interests of the king was a relative of the queen. It will be remembered that it was Mordecai's wish that they should not know.



It was, perhaps, because his nearness to the throne was unknown that Mordecai chanced one day to hear two of the king's chamberlains—that is, keepers of the doors of the palace—plotting against the king and planning to take his life. Mordecai told Esther, who in turn revealed the matter to the king in Mordecai's name. The king set his officials to inquire into the thing, and, when they found it to be true, the offending chamberlains were hanged upon a tree.

From the Bible story, it appears that King Ahasuerus, like kings of our own times, kept a sort of private book of record of all that happened about the palace, both of great things and small. To be sure, people in those days did not have books as we know them. Ancient Persian records were written upon thin tablets of wet clay, which were afterward

*An Ancient Book* baked and filed away in a place especially prepared to receive them. Modern scholars, digging about the ruins of ancient cities and palaces,

have found many such tablets that have lain for thousands of years buried in the ground. They record all sorts of things, and from them we may learn that in many ways life in those ancient times was much the same as now. A collection of such tablets was called a book. The book of records of King Ahasuerus was probably a sort of box or case filled with clay tablets which were covered with writing.

This is the kind of a book that is meant when the Bible tells us that, after the wicked chamberlains were hanged, the king caused the story of their offense to be written down in the book of chronicles or records of the royal court. The king wanted to be sure to remember the matter and the man who had saved his life. At the time, however, he did no more than just have the story written down, and perhaps soon forgot all about it, while Mordecai sat in his old place in the

king's gate the same as if nothing unusual had happened.

But Mordecai perhaps did not care. He was well-to-do, and, besides, he was not the kind of a man who would expect a special reward for doing his duty. Also when

*Virtue Its* he sat in the king's gate he could feel that

*Own Reward* he was near to Esther. In all likelihood he would have regarded as a misfortune the gift

of any high position that might have taken him out of easy reach of his beloved foster daughter. Long before, no doubt, he had learned that virtue is its own reward, and that among the best of all memories is that of having done a good deed in return for which no full reward may be given. For this reason Mordecai was content to sit in the king's gate and attend to the business of the king as it came before him day by day.

More and more, as we read of the great characters of the Bible, we learn that it is upon men like Mordecai that God most depends to do His work in the world. It has always been so; it must always be so. Big, unselfish men; men who find pleasure in doing right just because it is right; men who are equally careful and faithful in great things and small, and who are willing to remain unknown and unseen, if thereby the greatest good may come to their fellow-men—these are they whom God loves and from among their number, in all ages, His great leaders have come.

No doubt when she had given Mordecai's name to the king as one who had saved his life, Esther had hoped that the king would greatly honor him. She must have been sorely disappointed when Ahasuerus failed to do this. The king might forget, but God remembered. A time was to come when Mordecai would receive honors such as no man of his race had yet received from a foreign king; a time when God would have a great work for both Mordecai and Esther to do, but that time was not yet.





*The Rest of the King's Servants Bowd before Haman, but Mordecai  
Would Not*

## AN AGE-OLD ENEMY



OW, there was high in the favor of King Ahasuerus at this time a man named Haman. He was an Arab, an Amalekite—one of that despised race of marauding thieves who had been a foe and menace to the people of Israel from the days when, under the leadership of Moses, they came out of the bondage of Egypt. Ahasuerus perhaps neither knew nor cared about this. He was concerned about no one's enemies but his own. When he set Haman above all the other princes in his court, he did so in consideration of no one's wishes but his own and Haman's.

The Bible does not say why Haman was so highly promoted. It may have been as the result of a friendship sworn over the king's wine-cups, and would therefore be not unlike the king's foolish decree against Vashti. Whatever may have been the occasion of his rise, Haman showed himself to be unworthy of honor. He began at once to swagger around after the manner of small-minded people, and no doubt made a general nuisance of himself.

In those days persons in high positions in life expected people to bow themselves to the earth before them whenever they might appear in public. This was and still is the Oriental manner of showing marked respect to one deemed worthy of the highest honor. While Haman was wholly undeserving of such honor, yet the king had commanded that it be paid to him. As might be expected of such a man, Haman was very particular to exact this tribute at all times. Going

*An Unworthy  
Prince*



about like a strutting peacock and followed by a long retinue of servants and slaves, he insisted that people get down on their knees with their faces to the ground as he passed. If any, through pride or carelessness, failed to do so, they were probably beaten by his armed servants. All this seems very foolish to us, but such things were common in those days.

Haman enjoyed his new honors to the utmost, until one day when, with his retinue, he passed through the king's gate where Mordecai sat. Although all the rest of the king's servants bowed in the required manner, Mordecai would not so humble himself.

*Mordecai Bowed Not* When those who were daily with Mordecai in the king's gate saw that he did not bow to Haman, they said to him: "Why do you transgress the king's commandment?"

No doubt Mordecai explained to them that, as a Jew, such an act of reverence upon his part would be unlawful. Mordecai had another and very good reason for not bowing to Haman, and which he may or may not have explained. It was the ancient enmity between the Jews and the Amalekites. Mordecai could not but remember that Jehovah, through the prophet Samuel, had ordered King Saul to destroy these Amalekites to the last man, woman and child, and that it was only by Saul's disobedience to God's command that any of the condemned race were left alive. Mordecai could not bear the idea of giving to an enemy of God an act of reverence that, to the Jews' way of thinking, belonged to Jehovah alone.

But Mordecai's explanation did not satisfy the others of the king's servants, and they continued daily to speak to Mordecai about the matter. No doubt these other servants disliked this bowing before Haman quite as much as Mordecai. If this Jew did not have to degrade himself, why should they? In order to test out the thing and have it settled once for all, they went to Haman.

When Haman learned that Mordecai, a Jew, had refused to bow before him, all the inborn meanness of his Amalekite soul came into his heart. His first thought was to kill Mordecai with his own hand. Then the desire for a deeper revenge possessed him. As an Amalekite he must have hated the very name of a Jew. Besides, he was probably a descendant of Agag, the Amalekite king who, spared by King Saul, was hewn to pieces by the prophet Samuel. To kill only Mordecai would not satisfy Haman. He would induce Ahasuerus to destroy all Jews everywhere within the borders of his kingdom. With this horribly wicked plan in mind, Haman sought the presence of King Ahasuerus.

No doubt Haman well knew the easy road to the king's favor. It may well have been over the wine-cups that the scheming Amalekite leaned toward the weakling king and whispered:

"There is a certain people scattered abroad among all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from the laws of all other people, and neither do they keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not to the king's profit to suffer them to live. If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the business, that they may bring the money into the king's treasuries."

Perhaps even Ahasuerus, wicked and cruel as he was, would have been shocked into a refusal of this outrageous request had he known what Haman really wanted to do. But kings of that day were not very considerate of human life. Without even inquiring who the people might be that Haman wanted to destroy, he took the royal seal ring from his own finger and gave it to Haman and said: "The silver is given you, and the people, to do with them as you think best."



*It Was Told to Esther that Mordecai Was before the King's Gate in  
Sackcloth and Ashes*



Delighted with the apparent success of his scheme, Haman called together the officials of the king, and soon the decree was sent out into every province where the Jews lived, that on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, which corresponds to our month of February, all Jews, both young and old, should be destroyed and all their property taken as spoil. The king did not see this horrible document, although it was written in his name and signed with his own royal seal which he had given to Haman for that purpose.

*Haman's Decree  
of Death to  
the Jews*

The king's trust in his favored friend Haman was complete. It was to be a nasty piece of business Ahasuerus well knew. Was it not a friend worth while who would take it upon himself to arrange these affairs of ridding the kingdom of a lot of undesirable subjects and so relieve the king of worry and blame? No doubt this is the way Ahasuerus felt about the matter. And doubtless, also, as soon as the decree was done and sent to all the provinces of the kingdom, the mighty ruler of all the land from India to Egypt invited his friend Haman again to join him at the wine-cups. When the awful decree became known, the people of the city, who really had nothing against their kindly Jewish neighbors, were perplexed and horrified, while the Jews were thrown into consternation and despair.

*Days of Sorrow  
and Despair*

Mordecai heard of it and clothed himself in sackcloth and scattered ashes over his head, which is a way people used to do in times of great distress. In this manner he went about the city, crying out bitterly that his people were unjustly condemned, for they had done no wrong. In every province of the kingdom where the Jews lived there were sorrow and lamentation. As a decree of the Persian king once made could not be altered, the future of Mordecai's and Esther's people looked black indeed.

## ESTHER GOES BEFORE THE KING



IN the quiet of the palace, surrounded by her maidens, and every luxury that a royal husband could give to his queen, Esther knew nothing of what had occurred. Queens of the East, even in our own times, lead very secluded lives. Only upon occasions of state may they go outside the palace walls, and even then they are so surrounded by servants and pomp and ceremony that they may hardly be seen by the people.

It was so with Esther. Waited upon continually by servants who hastened to gratify her every wish, her days passed with music or whatever in the way of entertainment she might desire. The royal court, or judgment-hall, wherein the king sat in state upon his throne, she might enter only upon the invitation of the king. To have appeared there unbidden would have been at the risk of her life, for it was written into the law of the land that whoever might approach the king except at the royal command should be put to death, unless the king should hold out to that one the golden scepter or staff which he held in his hand.

Although he may have lived near the palace, Mordecai probably had not seen Esther to talk to her from the day when she was taken from him to go before the king. But Esther did not forget the man who had been so kind to her. Instead, she kept watch over him through her servants, by whom she sent messages to him and received from him messages in return.

Thus it came about one day that her servants told Esther that Mordecai was before the king's gate in sackcloth and ashes. Thinking perhaps that he was grieving because of her, she sent him new garments and bade him put them on. But Mordecai refused.

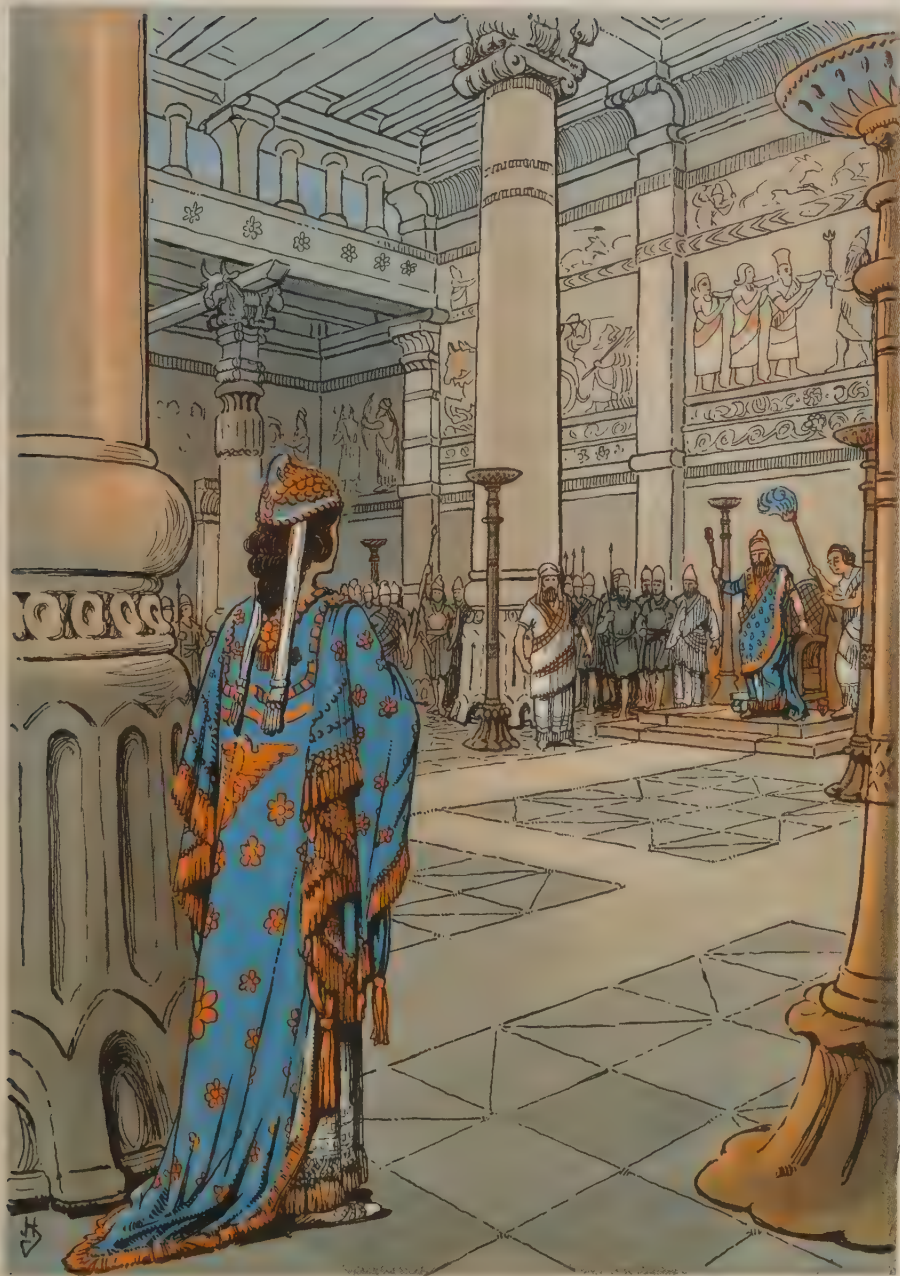
Then Esther called her chief servant, a man named Hatach, and sent him to Mordecai to learn what was the matter. Mordecai told Hatach all that had been done, and of the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. Mordecai also sent her a copy of the decree and begged her to go in before the king and plead with him for the lives of her people.

Esther sent Hatach again to Mordecai to say that she had not been called before the king for many days. She also reminded Mordecai of what he, as a servant of the king, must know, that whoever should approach the king unbidden should be put to death, unless the king should hold out the golden scepter to the one who approached him.

Mordecai said: "Tell Esther not to think that she, any more than the rest of her people, will escape the hand of Haman, and that, if she does not speak to the king and prevail upon him to spare us, then must the deliverance of the Jews come from some other source. In that case she and all her father's house shall surely be destroyed. Who knows," Mordecai said, "but what she has been given her high position in the kingdom for such a time as this?"

When Hatach brought this message to Esther, she replied: "Go and tell Mordecai to bring all the Jews together that are in Susa, and fast and pray for me, neither eating nor drinking for three days. I also and my maidens will fast. Then I will go in before the king, which is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."





*When the King Saw Esther, He Held Out to Her the Golden Scepter*

Mordecai did as Esther told him. On the third day of the fast Esther put on her most beautiful royal apparel, and it may be that, while her weeping maidens waited outside, entered alone the royal judgment-hall wherein the king sat upon his throne.

It is not difficult to imagine the look of horror upon the faces of those in the royal court when they saw this daring act of their beautiful queen. She knows the law, or should know it, they must have thought. Whatever could have led her to so endanger her life? No doubt the more kindly hearted among the king's servants hoped that she would remember her danger and go back before the king should look that way and see her.

Then the king looked. He saw Esther, and smiled and held out to her the golden scepter.

"What is it, Queen Esther?" he said. "What is your request? It shall be given even to the half of the kingdom."

Esther replied: "If it seem good to the king, let the king and Haman come this day to the banquet which I have prepared."

"Cause Haman to make haste," the king commanded, "that he may do as Esther has said." So the king and Haman came to Esther's banquet.

Again at the banquet the king said: "What is your petition, Esther? What is your request? It shall be granted; even to the half of the kingdom it shall be done."

Then said Esther: "My petition and my request is: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it may please the king to grant my wish, then let the king and Haman come again to-morrow to the banquet that I shall prepare for them."

The king again readily consented and Haman went out with a glad heart. Not only was he high in the king's favor, he thought, but the queen also was becoming partial toward

him. No doubt Haman began to see visions of a time when he could do with both of these royal personages much as he chose. But when he passed Mordecai in the king's gate and Mordecai did not bow to him, he could hardly contain his anger.

So great was Haman's rage that when he came to his own house he began to complain to his wife and to his friends, and to boast. "Look at all my riches," he said, "and all the things in which the king has advanced me. Even Queen Esther would allow no man but myself to come to the banquet which she had prepared for the king. And to-morrow I am again invited to dine with her and the king. But what are all these things when the Jew Mordecai, who sits in the king's gate, will not bow to me nor do honor to me?"

Then Haman's wife and his friends conceived what they thought to be a fine idea. It was that Haman should cause to be built a tall gallows, seventy-five feet in height, and that he should get permission from the king to hang Mordecai thereon. The thing suited Haman and he ordered the gallows immediately to be made.

Haman retired for the night, much pleased with himself. All in all, it had been, to his way of thinking, a good day. He had, as he thought, come still more into favor with the king and queen—a favor that he might easily turn to his future advantage. Most pleasing of all, to him, was the fact that he had found a way to satisfy his revenge upon the Jew, Mordecai. On the morrow, bright and early, he would speak to the king, and immediately thereafter he would hang Mordecai upon the highest gallows in the land, "that he might be raised above all men." After that, Haman thought, he could go with a merry heart to dine again with the king and queen.

*"What Are All  
These Things?"*

*"That He Be  
Elevated Above  
All Men"*





## THE MAN WHOM THE KING DELIGHTED TO HONOR



ON the night following Esther's banquet to the king and Haman, the ruler of all the land from India to Egypt could not sleep. At last, in the hope of finding something to occupy his thoughts until the new day should dawn, Ahasuerus had his servants bring the book of the chronicles of the king and read them before him.

It may be that, when sleep deserted the king just as it is likely to do any ordinary person, he did not feel so important, and wanted to be reminded of the things he *When the King* had done, and of the great powers that were *Can Not Sleep* his, in order to restore his royal pride. It must be a trying experience for a king to roll and toss upon his bed throughout a sleepless night, and thus be compelled to feel that, after all, he is only an ordinary mortal like the rest of mankind.

This was, perhaps, the way the king thought of the matter. In reality, however, there was a greater reason why the king should hear the chronicles read at this time. It was that the mighty ruler of a mighty kingdom was in the hands of a power greater than all the kings of the earth. He was, of course, not conscious of the fact, just as we may be but rarely, if ever, aware when God may be using us for some definite purpose of His own. The things we are doing may be very ordinary, and we may think that we are doing them entirely of our own will. Yet, when we see the results of some seemingly small, good deed that we have done, we can not but



*"An Adversary and an Enemy, Even This Wicked Haman"*



see that it must have been God directing us. In this chapter we may see how God can make use of even so fickle and unstable a creature as King Ahasuerus.

As the sleepy servant droned over one after another of the tablets he came at length to one upon which was recorded how the Jew, Mordecai, had saved the king's life by revealing a plot that two of the king's chamberlains had made against him. The servant, perhaps, was about to pass on to the next tablet when the king stopped him.

"What honor has been done to Mordecai for this?" he asked.

Then the king's servants answered that nothing had been done for him.

The king was in a very humane mood. If he could not sleep, he could at least give to himself the satisfaction of doing a good deed to a fellow human being.

<i>How God Uses</i>	It always gives one a pleasant feeling to re-
<i>Wicked Men</i>	pay a debt. The king asked: "Who is in the court?"

Now, Haman had just come into the outer court. He had come earlier than usual, because he wanted to ask the king's high permission to hang Mordecai. The servant looked and replied: "Haman is in the court."

"Tell him to come in," the king said.

When Haman had come into the royal presence, the king said to him: "What shall be done unto the man whom the king is delighted to honor?"

"Now, whom should the king be wanting to honor but myself?" thought Haman. Then, in the self-assurance that he was about to receive still higher honors at the hand of the king, Haman said:

"Thus let it be done to the man whom the king is delighted to honor. Let the king's own royal apparel be brought, and the king's horse with its royal crown. Let them be delivered

into the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array in the king's apparel the man whom the king is delighted to honor, and set him upon the king's horse. Then let him be led through the streets of the city, while runners go before, proclaiming: 'Thus shall

*This to Haman* it be done to the man whom the king is  
*Would Be Honor* delighted to honor.' "

Then, to Haman's surprise and consternation, the king said: "Make haste! Omit nothing of all you have spoken—take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew."

The humiliation of Haman was complete. He had no choice but to do for his enemy as he had desired that the king should cause to be done to Haman. After the trip through the streets of the city, Mordecai returned to the king's gate, but Haman went to his own house, mourning in self-pity and with his head covered. There, while he was telling his wife and friends of his misfortune, messengers from the king came, bidding him to hasten to the banquet that Queen Esther had prepared.

## THE FALL OF HAMAN AND RISE OF MORDECAI



IT is hard to believe that any one could be so wicked as to think it a pleasure to destroy a fellow human being. Yet that is the kind of a creature this Haman was. Because things had so happened that he did not dare to ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai, Haman thought of himself as very badly used indeed.

He had expected to go with a merry heart to the queen's second banquet—merry because he had thought that by that time Mordecai would be dead. Instead, as the wicked Amalekite took his way to the palace, his heart was full of fear that the worst for him might be yet to come.

As they sat at the banquet on the second day, the king yet again said to Esther: "What is your petition, Esther? It shall be given you. What is your request, and it shall be done even to the half of the kingdom."

The king knew that Esther had not risked her life to invite himself and Haman to a banquet merely because she might enjoy their company. His love for Esther was perhaps the one good thing in his otherwise worthless life. He knew that there must be some desire of Esther's heart as yet unspoken. It must have been some lingering streak of goodness within him that made him wish to reward in some way one so good and pure as Esther, and which caused him to make the generous offer of half his kingdom to assure her that she might speak without fear.

*The Influence of  
a Good Woman*



Esther replied: "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and the life of my people at my request. For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, to perish. Had we been sold as slaves, I would not have spoken, but we are sold to be destroyed."

*Esther Pleads  
for Her People*

As he listened to Esther's plea the king's anger rose. "Who is he," he demanded, "and where is he, who has dared to do this thing?"

Pointing to Haman, Esther said: "An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman." Then was Haman afraid before the king and queen.

The king did not reply. Silently he rose from the banquet and went out into the palace garden. The face he had turned away from the man who had been his friend and who had so deceived him was dark with anger. Haman knew that his wicked scheme had failed and that from the king he could expect no mercy. It was his turn, now, to wail and lament. In despair he fell upon his face before Queen Esther to plead for his life.

Can we blame Esther that she did not heed Haman's plea? She knew that, while the wicked Amalekite might promise anything to escape punishment, he would, once free, begin again to plot against the Jews to destroy them; also, it is by no means likely that the king would have spared Haman, even at Esther's request.

*Who Could  
Trust Haman?*

For it is believed that the king now saw in what Haman had tried to do something more than a plot to destroy the Jews. He could see in it a plan to destroy even the king himself, and to seize his kingdom and his throne for Haman, the Amalekite. Nor is this at all unlikely. There were thousands of Haman's race in the king's army. It was upon

these Amalekites, fierce desert warriors, that Haman was depending to carry out the work of destruction among the Jews when the appointed day should come.

Now, it happened that there were also many thousands of Jews in the king's army. These, the king knew, had many reasons to be loyal to him. Had not Darius  
*The King Now* and Cyrus, who had been kings before him,  
*Sees Clearly* shown them many favors, and even built for them synagogues and helped them to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem? With these loyal Jews out of the way, Haman and his Amalekites might, at their pleasure, find some excuse to start a revolution, murder the king and seize his kingdom for themselves.

It was, no doubt, with thoughts like these in his mind that the king returned to the banquet-room from the garden. By this time Haman, in pleading for his life, had fallen upon the couch whereon Queen Esther reclined. When the king saw this, it made him still more angry. Seeing this, the royal servants covered Haman's face, as was  
*Haman* the custom with one condemned to die.

*Condemned* Then Habonak, one of the chamberlains, said to the king: "Look, O king! There is the gallows, seventy-five feet high, which Haman built, upon which he planned to hang Mordecai, who saved the king's life."

"Let him be hanged thereon," the king said.

So Haman was hanged upon his own gallows, and thus was the king's anger pacified.

Afterward Haman's ten sons were also hanged upon the same gallows. This seems to us a needlessly cruel thing to do, but such things were customary in those days.

On the day that Haman was hanged, Esther made known to the king her race and her relationship to Mordecai. This pleased the king, and he sent for Mordecai and gave him the place of honor that Haman had held in the kingdom; also,

the king gave to Esther the house of Haman, and she in turn gave it to Mordecai, who went to live in it.

The king also, at Esther's request, sent out another decree which saved the Jews from the hands of their enemies. He could not, of course, recall the decree of Haman, for it will be remembered that a decree, once made and signed with the king's seal, could not be changed. But the new decree, which Mordecai wrote in the king's name, gave the Jews the right to prepare and to defend themselves against

*God Again Saves* whatever enemies might attack them. This  
*His People* had the desired effect and served, moreover, as a warning to all the peoples of the kingdom that Ahasuerus, like his fathers before him, was a friend of the Jews.

Thus it came about that, instead of sorrow and death, the Jews had joy and gladness on the day set apart for their destruction. On the day following this, they held a great feast of thanksgiving to God for their deliverance. The feast has been kept by the Jewish people from that day to this. It is called the feast of Purim, and always at that feast the story of the beautiful and good Queen Esther is read by her people.

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